A Short History of the American Massage Therapy Association

On August 16, 1943, the postgraduate class of the College of Swedish Massage in Chicago met in an open forum and decided to form a new professional association. At that meeting, the foundation of the new association was created in the form of a Pledge which was signed by 29 Charter Members. The basis of the Pledge was a commitment to service, ethical practice, and the massage therapy profession. Dues of 50¢ were collected.

By 1946, the American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses had grown to 68 members, and a more formal organization was developed. A Constitution and Bylaws were adopted at the first AAMM National Convention held in August 1946 in Kansas City, Missouri. As stated in this document:

The purpose of this association is to foster the spirit of cooperation, and exchange of ideas and techniques among its members, and to advance the science of massage so as to merit the respect and confidence of all people, and benefit mankind.

The 14 members present at this first National Convention in attended educational sessions on zone therapy, massage and therapy and craniopathy. AAMM President, Clark Cottrell stated, "I feel sure we are on the right track to the natural methods of healing. Let us keep faith in the great art of healing and in the Great Physician of all healing."

About this time the Association adopted an emblem consisting of the initials AAM... separated by a cross and enclosed in a circle. In 1948 this emblem was made available to members on a decal designed to be placed in a window to identify professional massage therapists. There was also a newsletter, *The Masseur*, published from 1946 to 1962 which contained information about Association activities and educational articles.

In 1949-1950, the Association officially began their efforts to help legitimize massage therapy through state laws. They formulated the Massage Registration Act, which was a model law for states to register legitimate massage therapists. Those efforts were strengthened with the establishment of the Legislation Fund in 1972, and continue to the present day.

In 1958, the name of the Association was changed to the American Massage & Therapy Association. The change was seen as desirable to give a new and more professional image to the Association. To symbolize the change, a new emblem was designed which depicts the hands upholding the torch of wisdom and understanding, the flame of service, the shield of strength and integrity, and the white signifying the purity of our hearts, our ideals and our aims. The basic elements of this emblem make up our AMTA trademark today.

For the next 30 years, the Association continued to grow and to promote professional massage therapy and the interests of its members. The AM&TA was incorporated in 1960, giving it legal status. A Code of Ethics was developed in 1960, and the *Massage Journal* replaced *The Masseur* as the official AM&TA publication in 1962. In the late 1960's, requirements for approval of massage training schools were strengthened.

The AMTA is a strong voice in setting the standards of education for massage therapy practitioners. From the beginning, Active members had to meet certain criteria for admittance to the Association. In the late 1970's, qualifications for Massage Therapist and Registered Massage Therapist were toughened, and Sports Massage certification was established in 1985.

Membership numbers and categories grew through the years. In 1946, the only two membership categories were Active and Honorary. Associate Members were admitted in 1961, Student Members in 1966, Auxiliary Members in 1973, and an International Membership category was added in 1987.

Starting with about 1,400 members in 1980, the AMTA grew to more than 12,000 by 1991.

The name of the Association was changed again in 1983 to the American Massage Therapy Association. Removal of the "&" supported the practice of massage therapy as a legitimate professional field unto itself, separate from physical therapy and focused on the arts and sciences of health and healing through human touch.

After 24 years as the *Massage Journal*, the official publication of the AMTA changed to the *Massage Therapy Journal* in 1986. The *MTJ* is primarily devoted to broader professional issues and longer articles. The members newsletter, *Hands On*, concentrates on information about the association itself and news from the chapters.

During the 1980's, the groundwork was laid to bring both the field of massage therapy and the AMTA itself into a period of renewed professional development. In 1988, a revised mission statement was adopted for the AMTA which reads:

The mission of the American Massage Therapy Association is to develop and advance the art, science and practice of massage therapy in a caring, professional and ethical manner in order to promote the health and welfare of humanity.

The Strategic Plan for Professional Development in the 1990's outlined a series of projects and goals which were to get their start at the close of the 1980's. These included: The National Certification Program for Massage Therapists; the AMTA Commission on Massage Training Accreditation/Approval; the AMTA Foundation; a revised AMTA Code of Ethics; the Law and Legislation Assistance Fund; and an official policy statement for political action at state and local level.

The association itself embarked on professional development with the establishment of a National Office in Chicago in 1989, and the hiring of the first AMTA Executive Director, Mark Anderson, in 1990. For the first time in its history, the AMTA has a paid staff to offer much needed support to the volunteer leadership. The challenge of the 1990's will be do develop both the staff and volunteer structures to effectively advance the mission of the association.

The American Massage Therapy Association continues to be in the forefront of the field of professional massage therapy, advancing the practice through certification, school accreditation, continuing education, professional publications, legislative efforts, and active public relations.

– Written by Patricia Benjamin, National Historian & Archivist